

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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RICHARD E. DECKER
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VICTORIA S. BENHAM, Associate Editor

G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

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NED BENHAM, Associate Editor

True happiness, it has been said, arises "from the friendship and conversation of a few select companions". If you will eavesdrop through the next few pages, I can guarantee a surprise.

TERENCE DANIELS carried the tray of prepared drinks around the room—to his sister, Nora, and to his cousins Ralph Martin and Pro-

thoughtfully at the fireplace. "It does seem to me that if only the murderer—whichever one of us he was—had waited just one or two

Silence is



essor Henry Walker respectively.

Professor Walker removed his Manhattan. "Thank you, Terence. That last police officer did say that it was a .38 caliber bullet through Uncle Emery's heart which did the job?"

Ralph Martin nodded and stared

years more, poor Uncle Emery might have passed away quite naturally."

They sipped their drinks and listened to the sound of the first evening cricket beyond the French windows.

Perhaps I really should have waited for his natural death, but Uncle Emery was descended from a line noted for its longevity. Despite his ailments, he might have lived another twenty years. I preferred not to wait that long.

The motive, of course, was money—a quarter share of approximately one million dollars. The others here would now share equally in the estate.

The room seemed rather stuffy. I had a slight headache.

Terence Daniels was tall and dark-haired. He smiled crookedly. "I suppose we must accept the unpleasant probability that one of us murdered Uncle Emery?"

Ralph Martin agreed. "When did the coroner fix the time of death?"

"At about three in the morning," Professor Walker said. "Whichever one of us killed Uncle Emery entered his room at that time and evidently shot him while he slept."

Ralph Martin was plump and balding. "And none of us claims to have heard the shot?"

"It's quite possible that none of us did, Ralph," Nora said. "After all, this is a large house and Uncle Emery slept alone in that remote bedroom on the third floor."

Terence went back to the liquor cabinet and opened one of the doors. "And so at three in the morning all of us were—or claimed to have been—innocently sleeping in bed. That is something difficult to prove or disprove. I do not envy the police their job." He moved a few bottles on the top shelf. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if the murderer got away with it."

Professor Walker watched him at the cabinet. "Are you looking for something, Terence?"

Terence brought forth a small tin box. "The aspirins. I knew they were in here some place. I've got a nagging headache."

I make no claims to having been particularly clever. I merely took obvious precautions and committed the crime on a day when all four of us were certain to be in the house, and at a time when we should have been asleep. In that manner I distributed the suspicion four ways and considerably reduced my stature as a suspect.

The greatest security, it appeared to me, lay in making the act of murder as uncomplicated as possible. No frills, no elaborate plan-

ning. And so I shot Uncle Emery while he slept and left the gun in his room.

I watched Terence swallow his aspirins and rather envied him. Unfortunately common headache remedies do little for me.

Professor Walker was thin and graying slightly. "I understand that there were no fingerprints on the gun?"

Nora Daniels wore a tweed skirt and jacket. She nodded. "That's right, Henry." She looked at her hands. "Those paraffin tests we took? Did they prove anything one way or another?"

Terence shook his head. "None of us had powder grains embedded in his—or her—hands. The police believe that the murderer wrapped cloth—perhaps a pillow case—around his hand and arm before he used the gun."

Contrary to what seems to be the usual custom among relatives, the four of us are quite a closely knit group. We regard each other with a great deal of affection and respect. We do not even indulge in minor bickering, and in moments of stress we have always presented a united front to the world.

I wondered what each of us would do with his share of Uncle Emery's estate. Terence, I im-

agined, would enthusiastically begin spending his money. Ralph, on the other hand, would probably invest his share in something solid and safe.

Terence finished his drink. "Let us establish one thing. If *we* should discover which one of us is the murderer, would anyone turn him over to the police?"

A poll quickly established that none of them would.

Professor Walker smiled. "Not even to increase his share of the estate?"

The denials were repeated and more emphatic.

Terence grinned. "All right, then, which one of us killed Uncle Emery? It's perfectly safe to confess, you know. You are secure in the bosom of the family, and I am consumed with curiosity."

Did Terence really mean what he was saying? I searched his face and the faces of the others. Yes! It really would be safe to tell them! I decided to speak.

Ralph put his empty glass on the cocktail table. "Of course we wouldn't go to the police. But there is another point to consider. Doesn't the possibility still exist that the police may eventually themselves discover which one of

us is actually the real murderer?"

His eyes went over the other three. "And in that case, isn't it possible, even probable, that they will also learn that we knew who the murderer was and concealed that fact?"

Professor Walker rubbed his jaw. "I, for one, am perfectly willing to take that chance."

Ralph shook his head. "It isn't a question of taking a chance, Henry. Don't you see that if we all know who the murderer is, and that fact came to light, none of us would receive a cent from Uncle Emery's estate? We would undoubtedly be adjudged *accomplices*. Neither a murderer *nor* his accomplices can benefit from the estate of the victim."

There was a thoughtful silence and then Nora spoke. "I see. If the police discovered that we were concealing the identity of the murderer, the entire project would have been committed without benefit to anyone. None of us would get a penny."

"Exactly," Ralph said. "And I rather believe that the murderer,

even if he is discovered by the police, would not want that to happen to us. And so I think that, if he is as fond of us as we are of him, he *owes* it to us not to reveal his identity."

Terence sighed. "I suppose you're right, Ralph. But I'm certain my curiosity will kill me."

I was a bit disappointed in not being able to tell them that I was the murderer, but I agreed that Ralph's reasoning represented the wisest course.

I reached for the lipstick in my jacket pocket.

Nora smiled slightly. "Do you suppose that some day—*after* we've all received our inheritance—the murderer can tell us who he is? The police wouldn't take the money away from us then, would they?"

Professor Walker smiled too. "I'm afraid they would, Nora." He removed his hand from his pocket. "By the way, Nora, I found this lipstick on the hall table. Is it yours?"

